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AN APPROACH TO IDEALISM.

TOO much emphasis perhaps is laid, in recent expositions, on the logical, the more strictly metaphysical and technical aspects of Bernard Bosanquet's philosophy, such as its view of the Absolute or of the logic of the concrete universal; and too little has been done by commentators in the way of bringing out the broader, the more immediately human and richer aspect of that philosophy. For it is to my mind the direct human side of Bosanquet, our best living exponent of idealism, that needs emphasizing to-day, not primarily because this side is 'human' or 'idealistic,' but because possibly through this approach a great philosophy can be a little more widely and genuinely understood, and can, therefore, a little better "help to recall and concentrate the modern mind out of its distraction." And at a time when psychiatrists are nervously bemoaning a world hysteria, even slight aid is to be valued. Ultimately what ails the world is its philosophy, its ideas; and through philosophy its ultimate cure must come. Nor is it possible to say that bad philosophy died when Germany was defeated. If Germany's war psychosis was due basically to a faulty naturalistic metaphysic, applying the doctrine of natural selection to the lives of men and groups of men, then various other nations are not so far removed from Germany's point of view as they think, save in relentlessness of logic and rigor of application. Of extant metaphysics, idealism is very nearly the only one which actually has kept itself free from the fatal error of accepting a scientific naturalism as a 'pou sto,' which thenceforth becomes philosophy's point of departure, not to be gainsaid save at the risk of being unscientific. To-day philosophical analyses which begin and deal directly with human life and experience as it concretely is, and not as it is interpreted as being when viewed through the abstract conceptual glass of a naturalistic biology and psychology, are at a premium.

Any approach, therefore, to a way of thought which, far from being abstract and supra-human, stands almost alone in beginning

with, and remaining faithful to, the actual life of man should be carefully considered.

Idealism has many handles, many avenues of approach. It is possible through religion, through art, through political reflection, through social philosophy, through logic, through technical epistemology to work into a genuine appreciation of the philosophy of Plato and Hegel and Bosanquet, and no way can be finally neglected. But with regard to directness and simplicity these ways differ. The actual world of human experience and knowledge is, of course, the world which philosophy attempts in some sense to enlighten; and yet frequently so complex are the steps leading to and encompassing a philosophy that by the time a thinker has traveled the way, he has more or less lost contact with his starting-point. His philosophy then lacks directness and cogency, less through its own shortcomings perhaps than because of the difficulty of its attainment.

The logical aspect of idealism, for example, is an entirely necessary part of that metaphysic; its logical spirit and technique is indeed, as every reader of Bosanquet knows, in one sense its very essence. But to stress this aspect alone, even to point out its merit as logic,¹ is to confirm the critic in his belief that idealism is still a 'ballet of bloodless categories,' and to give the impression that technique in idealism is cardinal. Further, the logic of idealism (the logic of consistency and non-linear implication), regardless of its soundness as contrasted, say, with instrumental logic or realistic logic, is not the aspect of the philosophy that contrasts most sharply and illuminatingly with other metaphysics. A survey of the nature and spirit and point of view of much of contemporary philosophy, as Russell's realism, conveys the idea that philosophical soundness and correct orientation are chiefly matters of a certain facility in handling categories of one sort or another.

¹ See the excellent article on Bosanquet's *Logic* (Revised Ed.) by Sabine, entitled "Professor Bosanquet's Logic and the Concrete Universal," *PHIL. REV.*, Vol. XXI., pp. 546-565 (Sept., 1912). And yet Professor Sabine gives the impression that Bosanquet's idealism is merely a matter of the logic of consistency, or perhaps better, as if the logic of consistency summed up Bosanquet's philosophy.

Yet the fact is, as idealism should be the first to point out, and as it does, I think, in connection with the approach I am about to consider, that sound philosophical orientation is obtained, not so much by technique or cleverness as by a serious and open-minded scrutiny of the length and breadth and depth of human life *as it is lived*. Much of the artificiality of philosophical writings, and much of the timid, over-strained, aloof, essentially sceptical spirit that one so often meets, are due to an early attained and altogether excessive preoccupation with concepts rather than with human life. Concepts and thinking of the best possible sort we must of course have, but they must be in the service of a constructive thinker rightly oriented to human experience and experiences. When they constitute a world apart from the concrete existing world, as they did in *Scholasticism*, they churn up a pottage of their own creation, but give us little hint of the birthright of men and philosophers alike. No ingenuity, for example, can squeeze out of mathematico-realistic metaphysic the full concrete richness of the everyday life of humanity; no ingenuity in manipulating a set of principles can atone for the philosophical inadequacy of those principles.

And to see this is not so much a matter of logic as it is of an active and appreciative awareness of the important things in human existence. It is because the great poet does not soon commit himself to a closed system of conceptions or 'first principles' that his ripe thought often exceeds in real penetration the effort of the metaphysician. He has analyzed and become sensitive to genuinely human actual values, where the philosopher, frequently misled by his immersion in scientific and logical *conceptions*, sees and interprets such values only at secondhand—through the distorting light of a particular theory.¹

If, therefore, idealism is concrete where other current philosophies are abstract, if it can deal with and light up actual and

¹ The best example of this in philosophy (as contrasted with science, which necessarily uses abstract universals) is new realistic thought. It would be difficult to deduce from internal evidence that the new realism has anything to do with concrete human experience. It seems to find its substance in organisms, *qua* organisms, and an environment, *qua* environment, the matter of fact content of life being ignored.

specific human problems where other philosophies look 'through a glass darkly,' then the approach to it should be, in nature, as nearly as possible akin to the philosophy itself, *i.e.*, it should be direct, actual, a matter of living experience. As one would expect, an approach of this nature has been indicated by Bosanquet, and its importance for further and more difficult idealistic thought pointed out. I wish to recall briefly the chief ideas in that early and little-referred-to essay of Bosanquet's, "On the True Conception of Another World."¹

Bosanquet begins this essay by pointing out that Hegel's philosophy is always and through all concerned with human experience. "All appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, Hegel is faithful to the present and the concrete. In the study of his philosophy we are always dealing with human experience."² What is true of Hegel's philosophy is, so the modern idealist believes, even more true of idealism to-day.³

Now if idealism is of human experience, what is its point of view regarding it? How does it differ in its method of surveying life from other and more abstract and remote metaphysics? For all thought starts somehow with human experience. Idealism's view of experience is not different, at the start, from the view of any other philosophy; it is not different from the view of the poet or the scientist. Idealistic thought becomes such, after proper development, because it discerns and *pushes home* the importance of a distinction within experience which all thought discerns as to fact but not as to significance.

Bosanquet leads up to the point, in the essay in question, by discussing the popular conception of 'another world,' a world remote and beyond ordinary human life which it nevertheless perhaps doubles in a ghostly though glorified way. Now this unknowable world, the transcendental realm of the 'Infinite, the

¹ First published as "the introduction to a translation of a fragment of Hegel's *Aesthetic*," and later reprinted in the volume *Essays and Addresses* (Swan Sonnenschein, London, 1899).

² *Essays and Addresses*, p. 92.

³ Due largely to idealism's natural development, but also to the reform Hegel started. See Bosanquet, *Distinction between Mind and its Objects*, esp. p. 54 ff.; also Bosanquet's article, "The History of Philosophy," in *Germany in the Nineteenth Century*.

suprasensuous, the Divine' is, of course, an impossible one in philosophy, whatever its value to ordinary picture-making thought. It, like any similar 'marble temple shining on a hill,' is entirely antipodal to idealism, the essence of which, it is significant to observe, the critic nevertheless asserts it to be.¹ "There is, however, a genuine distinction between 'this' world and the 'other' world, which is merely parodied by the vulgar antithesis between natural and supernatural, finite and infinite, phenomenal and noumenal," a "distinction which falls within the world which we know, and not *between* the world we know and another world we do not know."² This distinction within human experience is simply the distinction between the world of sense, on the one hand, and the world of thought, and more generally the 'spiritual' world, on the other hand.³ To this latter world, or kind of experience, its nature and its significance both in itself and as an aid to our understanding the philosophy of Hegel, Bosanquet devotes the major part of his essay. "That the world of mind, or the world above sense, exists as an actual or organized whole, is a truth most easily realized in the study of the beautiful. And to grasp this principle as Hegel applies it, is nothing less than to acquire a new contact with spiritual life. The spiritual world, which is present, actual, and concrete, contains much besides beauty. But to apprehend one element of such a whole must of course demand a long step toward apprehending the rest. It is for this reason that I propose to explain, by prominent examples, the conception of a spiritual world which is present and actual, in order to make more conceivable Hegel's views on the particular sphere of art. So closely connected, indeed, are all the embodiments of mind, his 'Philosophy of Fine Arts' may be said to contain the essence of his entire system."⁴

¹ Cf. James, Dewey, Schiller, *et cetera*.

² Bosanquet, *Essays and Addresses*, P. 96, p. 94.

³ No further explanation than that furnished by the rest of this article is perhaps necessary for this apparent identification of the thought world and the spiritual world. Though obviously different in important respects these worlds are alike in their common distinction from the sense world, and in their being based on what the psychologist calls "central consciousness." There is of course no justification for the criticism that the idealist believes himself to have "spiritualized" the world when he has proved it "mental."

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

I do not of course wish to reproduce here the rest of the essay, though in this day and generation it might be worth while. I do wish to indicate, following Bosanquet's own argument, something of the importance of this distinction within human experience of a sense world and a spiritual world. 'Something' only, for a complete discussion would be a complete idealistic metaphysic. But to suggest the nature of this spiritual world, to indicate in part the relation it bears to the sense world—this is to start on the path of constructive idealism, this is to approach idealism in what seems to me the simplest, most direct, and possibly the most cogent way.

If we consider any of our distinctively human spheres of activity, such as the world of morals, or of art, or of politics, we find what at first sight seems a peculiar thing, namely, that the objects in such a sphere, and indeed the whole sphere itself, do not exist, *as objects in a moral realm*, or a political realm, apart from some judging or interpretive act on the part of a mind. The object itself may exist as a natural matter-of-fact object, but not as a moral object, because morality implies and refers to some standard or purpose or ideal which itself is not a 'given' fact. Only in a mind where such a standard or ideal is active, can an object be qualified as good, honest, etc. A good deed, for example, is on one side or in one aspect the behavior of an organism, probably with regard to some other organism. But, as psychology itself points out, the literal and perceptible behavior involved,¹ as a fact for science to study, has nothing whatever to do with its moral quality, as a moralist might study it. Behavior is behavior, whether it be called 'good' or 'bad,' and it has its natural laws. The behavior *as a good deed* simply does not exist for the psychologist. For whom, then, does it exist? In what world are good deeds possible and actual? Where is the fact called a 'good deed' (life certainly contains many such), and how does it arise? The answer is that a good deed, *as such*, exists only in the world of morality, in the structure of which alone it becomes 'good,' in that 'moral fabric' which conscious intelligence creates and sustains as part of the total spiritual world. Not until an act (a

¹ Including the 'possibly perceptible' nerve currents.

mere brute fact stimulating a sense-organ, in one aspect) is caught up into that unity which we call a human moral intelligence does it become a fact of the spiritual world and a fact of everyday actual human experience in so far as such experience is in part spiritual and hence typically or distinctively *human*.¹

So could examples be multiplied. "The unity of a Christian church or congregation is a governing fact of life; so is that of a family or a nation; so, we hope, will that of humanity come to be. What is this unity? Is it visible and tangible, like the unity of a human body? No, the unity is 'ideal'; that is, it exists in the medium of thought only; it is made up of certain sentiments, purposes, and ideas. What, even of an army? Here, too, an ideal unity is the mainspring of action. Without mutual intelligence and reciprocal reliance you may have a mob, but you cannot have an army. But all these conditions exist and can exist in the mind only. An army, qua army, is not a mere fact of sense; for not only does it need mind to perceive it—a heap of sand does that—but it also needs mind to make it."² Thus, too, in varying degree with any of the distinctively human spheres of interest: thought either 'makes' its object and its world, or expands and sustains a realm ostensibly based on the 'given,' as in most of the sciences. And these worlds from any point of view cannot be conceived as 'existing' actually, although they are doubtless always potentially real, apart from the eliciting and sustaining power of conscious intelligence. The world of nature, conceived as existing apart from man, exhibits no morality, no literature, no religion, no thought or spiritual realm, in short, of any kind. Of course, if these thought-sustained worlds are true—in so far as they are proved to be true—we do not ordinarily think of them as merely subjective, arbitrary creations of the human mind. We welcome them as giving us a greater knowledge of the universe of which man and his works are a part.

It is true that man's spiritual world rests on a basis of material or natural fact, as the religious world with its churches, rites, etc., the scientist with his laboratory and instruments, the poet with his manuscript and pen, or, more specifically, the man with his body

¹ The world of nature as such knows no morality, as Huxley has told us.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 97.

and nervous system, the painting with its canvas and oils, etc. But true also is it that we find growing upon such bases the 'higher,' the more significant and enlightening spiritual nature of the church, of the scientist's constructions, of the poem, of the man. And such further reality, growing out of the natural sense-world though it undoubtedly does, is not only that part of human experience that is distinctive and important; it is also that 'world' wherein the very natural sense-world itself is understood and developed and revealed in a fuller significance than it itself, as a sense-world, possesses. Any instance of knowledge and experience revealing the significance of a fact, any penetration of the import latent in the 'primrose by the river's brim,' any scientific absorption in a world suggested by, but far removed from, an experiment, is an illustration quite in point.

We have, then, as a fact of human experience what are relatively two worlds, the one of 'sense' which is given, the other a spiritual world which is constructed; the latter grows out of and upon the former, as the former becomes more significant and complete in the latter. *Strictly speaking*, the world of art and beauty, the world of morality, the world of friendship and loyalty and religion would not exist except for the constructive power of human thought because the facts of these worlds do not exist as merely 'natural' facts; they are not 'given' facts. In so far as such worlds have an instinctive basis, they may have a sort of mechanical counterpart in the lives of men before men become self-conscious, and may even be foreshadowed in the behavior of certain animals. But certainly such facts, which might be called 'natural' and 'given' are utterly unlike the self-conscious morality, friendship, etc., which we find in fully developed man. And what even of the world of science where the facts are supposed to be 'given' and natural? In what sense, save in the same potential sense as for the worlds of morality or literature, would the world of the biologist or the physicist exist were it not for the constructing and sustaining power of reason?¹ What significance has a natural fact, conceived as isolated and as 'existing alone'? What is a natural and given fact apart from some scientific or pre-

¹ Cf. Norman Kemp Smith, "The Present Situation in Philosophy," *PHIL. REV.*, Vol. XXIX., pp. 1-26.

scientific world of intelligence? Is not the natural world simply a part of that wider spiritual world which includes morality, beauty, etc., as well as science, and which as being our total human experience, stands in much the same relation to the world of science as the world of science does to any one of its facts—giving it meaning, making it an actual vital factor in living human experience? Is not the so-called natural world simply one aspect of that total world which we conceive as the real world and which we have “elicited” from (or constructed on the basis of) whatever has been and is presented to a reasoning mind?¹ Why, not only logically, but humanly, should we wrench this natural world from its setting within our whole concrete experience and set it up as the archetype of “real reality”? For are not the very “given sense-data” from which the scientific reason starts *sense-data* only in a world of intelligence which can so construe and interpret them?

We are progressing with some rapidity, of course, into bitterly contested metaphysical ground! And the critic has long since accused us of subjectivism, of failing to distinguish the world of thought from the real world, of identifying the “knowing” and the “object known,” etc., etc. The critic can be answered, I believe, and on his own technical and logical ground.² I do not care, however, in the present connection, to attempt any such answer. Rather let us go back to everyday experience where we find, as a fact, the two worlds. For to realize their existence, their distinct yet related nature; to realize the vivifying, extending, interpreting function which the spiritual world has with respect to the sense-world, in living experience and apart from further metaphysical interpretation; to watch and reflect upon the transformation (not annihilation) which an object undergoes when caught up by reason

¹ “Knowledge starts neither from sense-data nor from general principles, but from the complex situation in which the human race finds itself at the dawn of self-consciousness.” Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, p. xxxviii. (Quoted from Bosanquet's *Implication and Linear Inference*, p. iv.)

² A good recent answer, for example, to the criticism that idealism fails to distinguish thought and reality is found in Creighton, “Two Types of Idealism,” *Phil. Rev.*, XXVI., pp. 514–536, and in Jones, “The Basis of Significant Structures,” *Phil. Rev.*, Jan. 1921, Vol. XXX., 1. It is evident, I think, that if the critic is wrong, it is because of his fundamental point of view, not because of faulty reasoning based on a true point of view.

into a wider and deeper context, on the transformation, too, which takes place in a mind or self which thus exercises reason—all this is to take the direct approach to idealism. “The mind that sees only color—sense or sense perception—is different from the mind that sees beauty, the self-conscious spirit. The latter includes the former, but the former does not include the latter. To the one the color is an ultimate fact; to the other it is an element in a thing of beauty. This relation prevails throughout between the world of sense and the world above sense.”

I am not asking that we moon mystically over the spiritual world and its wonder until by auto-suggestion we believe it to be the ‘sole reality.’ I am asking only that in facing the questions of the foregoing paragraphs we do so with full recognition of certain facts of human experience, of the fact, for instance, that to extract from our world those parts obviously created by intelligence, such as the world of morality, would leave a human experience so mutilated as not to be recognizable.¹ I am asking that we take into serious consideration, when constructing a metaphysic, the actual, important creations of mind as these are found embodied in the structure of human experience. In trying to evaluate the world of intelligence, the philosopher can learn much from the scientist’s ‘theory of sampling.’ Samples, while chosen at ‘random,’ must nevertheless be representative of the group or whole of which they are samples. Yet how far representative of mind and its work are the points at issue in such arguments as, “is the table merely a product of my imagination, a dream table in a very prolonged dream?”² or “is the tree green when the organism is absent?” Regardless of how these questions are answered, the answer, if taken as characterizing mind, would have a distressingly large

¹ It is the idealist’s contention, too, as suggested above, that scientific constructions, though based on ‘natural facts’ in a sense in which the world of morality is not based on ‘natural facts,’ are nevertheless valuable and significant only as *an aspect* of the total experience they contribute to. “In the theory of colors, *e.g.*, or of sounds, the ‘dominant’ concepts are derived from an analysis of colors and sounds themselves—colors as such, or as actually seen, sounds as such, or as actually heard and it is only the ordering of these data in terms drawn from their own nature that gives relevance to the subsequent correlation of color-differences or sound differences with differences in the rate of vibration of some elastic medium.” Hoernlé, *Studies in Contemporary Metaphysics*, p. 145.

² Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 26.

'Probable Error.' Such logical and human minutiae, such close-range epistemological analyses, may be, and are, entirely necessary, but to bury ourselves in such abstractions *ab initio*, to forget to include as part of our material for philosophizing the whole wide and deep range of human experience is to exercise logic and technique only upon the trivial,—and to emerge with an attenuated metaphysic incapable of dealing "with any actual human achievement or utterance."¹

From such a broad viewpoint and by such an approach is the spirit of idealism best understood. And of such facts and considerations as are indicated in the foregoing is it made. The distinction between sense and reason, admitted by all and by all too hastily and too superficially interpreted, is a distinction which, carefully considered and pressed home, is perhaps the first step in idealism as understood by all genuine idealists from Plato to Bosanquet. The study, either in logic or in life,² of the *modus operandi*, and of the consequences to the self, of, for example, the transformation of a color from an 'ultimate fact' into an "element in a thing of beauty" is a study typical of constructive idealism—and of absolutism. For Bosanquet's Absolute, at any rate, is found in nothing more transcendental than such a change. The 'click' of a fact as it takes its place in a greater 'world' of thought and loses its (isolated) self to find its (more significant) self in the greater world is the sound of the Absolute—and at work in a pragmatic world!

Idealism needs and uses no fixed principles or presuppositions, it makes no initial assumption as to the metaphysical priority of mind, it needs and uses no other worldly and gratuitous Absolute to tie together broken fragments of terrestrial thought and experience.³ Idealistic thought might perhaps, if it chose, boast of a technique second to none, but the beginning of wisdom is not found in technique. It is rather found in a recognition of the 'central things in life,' a realization of what it is that intelligence

¹ See Bosanquet, *Philosophical Theory of the State*, p. xxxix, note 2.

² "In logic"—*e.g.*, in Bosanquet's *Logic* and other more technical writings; "in life," so to speak, or from life, *e.g.*, Bosanquet's *Gifford Lectures*, *The Philosophical Theory of the State*.

³ See *Essays in Critical Realism*, p. 7.

is doing in history as well as in art, in science as well as in literature, in everyday life as well as in the study.

"The 'things not seen,' philosophically speaking, are no world of existences or of intelligences coördinate with and severed from this present world. They are a value, an import, a significance, superadded to the phenomenal world, which thus may be said, though with some risk of misunderstanding, to be degraded into a symbol. The house, the cathedral, the judge's robe, the general's uniform, are ultimate facts for the child or the savage; but for the civilized man they are symbols of domestic life, of the church and of the state. Even where the supersensuous world has its purest expression, in the knowledge and will of intelligent beings, it presupposes a sensuous world as the material of ideas and of actions. 'This' world and the 'other' world are continuous and inseparable, and all men must live in some degree for both. But the completion of the Noumenal world, and the apprehension of its reality and completeness, is the task by fulfilling which humanity advances."¹

In the foregoing I have, of course, indicated only an approach to idealism, not proofs. However, in so far as right orientation is essential to proof, or to the understanding of proof, an approach is of first importance for exposition of any kind. As characterizing a direct, relatively simple approach, the following points may serve as a summary of this paper:

1. There is for reflection an important distinction within experience, namely, a distinction between the sense-world and the thought or spiritual-world.

2. The thought-world "creates" (in the sense of eliciting from the given and sustaining) a large part of man's total experience.

3. The thought-world plays an important part even in our experience of the given natural world.

4. To attempt to eliminate from "real reality" the part created by thought would be to destroy our experience as *human* experience.

5. In evaluating metaphysically the work of thought in our actual world, we should consider thought in connection with its more important achievements as well as in less vital connections.